

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 04907 01 OF 02 021839Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 AID-05 IGA-02 EB-08 OMB-01
TRSE-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07
NSAE-00 DODE-00 L-03 H-01 PRS-01 CU-02 DHA-02
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4228
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 4907
C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - SECTION INFORMATION OMITTED
E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, EAID, SY
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S ASSESSMENT OF FY 1979 U.S. SECURITY
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SYRIA

1. I CAREFULLY REVIEWED THE FY 1979 ANNUAL BUDGET SUBMISSION
(ABS) AT THE TIME OF ITS PREPARATION BY USAID DAMASCUS
AND HAVE NOW RESTUDIED ITS ELEMENTS IN PREPARING THIS
ASSESSMENT. I FIRMLY ENDORSE BOTH THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM
AS SUBMITTED AND THE FUNDING LEVEL OF \$90 MILLION IN SECURITY
SUPPORT ASSISTANCE (AND \$22 MILLION UNDER PL 480 TITLES I AND
II) FOR FY 1979.

2. THE PROVISION OF SECURITY SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA
BEGAN IN FY 1975 WITH ALLOCATION OF \$83 MILLION FROM THE
MIDDLE EAST SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FUND FOR ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA
IN SUPPORT OF USG EFFORTS TO PROMOTE DISENGAGEMENT OF FORCES
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EVENTUAL PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE
MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. APPROPRIATIONS OF \$95 MILLION IN
FY 1976 AND THE TRANSITION QUATER AND \$80 MILLION IN 1977
2343 -0049;3\$?6 :9,&43 , AND \$90 MILLION WAS
REQUESTED FOR FY 1978.

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 04907 01 OF 02 021839Z

EM THE RATIONALE FOR US ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA IS POLITICAL.
SUCH ASSISTANCE IS DESIGNED BOTH TO FURTHER OUR EFFORTS
TO SECURE A MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT (AND THE LESSER
INCLUDED OBJECTIVE OF PREVENTING ANOTHER MIDDLE EAST WAR)
AND TO SUPPORT US BILATERAL INTERESTS IN SYRIA. A MORE
DETAILED STATEMENT OF THESE INTERESTS IS CONTAINED IN THE
ANNUAL POLICY AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT FOR FY 1979

(DAMASCUS 2153).

4. BESIDES REINFORCING THE US POSITION AS MEDIATOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT, OUR ASSISTANCE AIMS AT INCREASING SYRIA'S INTEREST IN AND COMMITMENT TO ITS OWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONVERSELY, TO LESSENING THE ATTRACTIVENESS TO SYRIA'S LEADERSHIP OF ANOTHER DESTRUCTIVE WAR. SUCH ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN AND I BELIEVE, WILL CONTINUE TO BE HELPFUL IN MAINTAINING SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT AND IN INDUCING GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND MODERATION IN SYRIAN POLICIES AND POSITIONS REGARDING SUCH A SETTLEMENT.

5. BILATERALLY, US ASSISTANCE DEMONSTRATES US INTEREST IN STRENGTHENING ITS RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND IN CONTRIBUTING TO SYRIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. (WHILE NOT AMONG OUR ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES, I WOULD ALSO EXPECT US ASSISTANCE TO ACT AS A HEDGE AGAINST RUPTURE OF US/SYRIAN RELATIONS, AS OCCURRED IN 1967, WHILE WE PURSUE OVER AN EXTENDED AND UNCERTAIN PERIOD AHEAD, OUR PEACE SETTLEMENT EFFORTS.)

6. IN ADDITION TO THE PROGRAM'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING MORE SPECIFIC COMMENTS:

(A) HIGH VISIBILITY IMPACT PROJECTS NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL AID PROGRAMS ARE NOT THE PRIMARY CONCERN IN SYRIA. OUR ADVANTAGE COMES FROM ADOPTING A COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE TO SYRIA'S OWN DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND DEMON-
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 04907 01 OF 02 021839Z

STRATING OUR WILLINGNESS TO BE HELPFUL TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IN MEETING ITS OWN DEVELOPMENT GOALS. THIS APPROACH, WHICH INCLUDES TRAINING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND A VARIETY OF DESIGN, FEASIBILITY AND SECTOR STUDIES, AS WELL AS ECONOMICALLY JUSTIFIED CAPITAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS SYRIA CONSIDERS IMPORTANT, HAS GRADUALLY BEEN GAINING US GREATER TRUST AND ACCEPTANCE AMONG SYRIAN DECISION MAKERS. THE FACT THAT SOME OF THESE PROJECTS MAY TAKE SEVERAL YEARS TO COMPLETE IS SEEN HERE AS A POSITIVE FACTOR IN OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS SYRIA. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE LIVE UP TO OUR REPUTATION AS THE BEST AND MOST ADVANCED AVAILABLE SOURCE FOR TECHNOLOGY, TRAINING AND SPECIALIZED DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, AND THAT THE ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE WHICH WE PROVIDE BE GENUINELY USEFUL TO SYRIA AND CONTRIBUTE TO ITS DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES.

(B) WHILE THE NATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES WE ARE UNDERTAKING HAS HAD A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT, THE LENGTH OF TIME IT SOMETIMES TAKE TO SHAPE SOME OF THESE PROJECTS CAN DETRACT FROM THE IMAGE WE WISH TO PRESENT. I AM VERY PLEASED THAT AID'S NEW LEADERSHIP IS SEEKING WAYS TO SIMPLIFY PROJECT APPROVAL PROCEDURES AND REDUCE DELAYS FROM OUR SIDE IN ADVANCING PROJECTS

TO COMPLETION.

(C) I CANNOT ENDORSE THE CONCEPT THAT WE CAN SET
MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM FUNDING LEVELS FOR OUR ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM IN SUPPORTING US POLITICAL OBJECTIVES. TO SAY THAT
A REDUCED LEVEL OF FUNDING WILL GO MOST OF THE WAY TOWARDS
MEETING OUR OBJECTIVES IS FALLACIOUS; SYRIA WILL REGARD ANY
REDUCTION IN OUR ASSISTANCE LEVEL AS A LESSENING OF USG
POLITICAL INTEREST BOTH IN RESOLVING THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT
AND IN ITS BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA. THUS OUR REQUESTED
PROGRAM SHOULD REMAIN AT \$90 MILLION. IF REDUCTIONS ARE
UNAVOIDABLE, IN EITHER THE EXECUTIVE OR THE LEGISLATIVE STAGE,
THEIR NEGATIVE IMPACT CAN BE REDUCED BY ASSURING THAT
PROPORTIONAL REDUCTIONS ARE APPLIED TO THE PROGRAMS FOR
JORDAN, EGYPT AND ISRAEL.
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 04907 01 OF 02 021839Z

(D) THE FY 1979 ABS PROJECTS ASSISTANCE AT THE SAME
ANNUAL LEVEL DURING THE FY 1980-1983 PERIOD. THIS PROJECTION
IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION OF CONTINUING US INVOLVEMENT IN A
NEGOTIATING PROCESS EXTENDING WELL INTO THE EIGHTIES. WHILE
SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTIONS IN US ASSISTANCE MIGHT WELL BE
ENVISAGED IN A POST-PEACE SETTLEMENT ERA, WHEN SYRIA
ITSELF WILL BE ABLE TO DEVOTE MORE ITS OWN DOMESTIC RESOURCES
TO DEVELOPMENT, IT IS CURRENTLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FORECAST
WHEN THIS NEW ERA MAY COME ABOUT.

NOTE BY OC/T: CU AND DHA TREAT AS ORIGINAL.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 04907 02 OF 02 021203Z POSS DUPE
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 AID-05 IGA-02 EB-08 OMB-01

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4229

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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 4907

(E) WHILE ENDORSING THE PROGRAM CONTENT AS IT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED IN THE ABS, I DO NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT CHANGES IN SYRIAN PRIORITIES MAY NECESSITATE SOME RECONSIDERATION OF OUR ANTICIPATED ACTIVITIES. WE MIGHT WANT TO HELP MEET A NEW AND MORE SEVERE FOREIGN EXCHANGE CRISIS, FOR EXAMPLE, BY SHIFTING FUNDS FROM CAPITAL TO COMMODITY ASSISTANCE. FURTHERMORE, AS OUR RECENTLY SIGNED BILATERAL CULTURAL AGREEMENT MOVES INTO IMPLEMENTATION WE MAY WISH TO CONSIDER COMPLEMENTING TECHNICAL TRAINING UNDER OUR EXCELLENT PARTICIPATING TRAINING PROGRAM WITH POST GRADUATE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS AIMED AT OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE CREAM OF SYRIAN YOUTH TO OBTAIN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES. I DO NOT AT THIS POINT ANTICIPATE MILITARY ASSISTANCE OF ANY SORT TO SYRIA IN FY 1979. WE SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, CATEGORICALLY CLOSE THE DOOR TO SALES OF NON-LETHAL EQUIPMENT OR PROVISION OF MILITARY TRAINING IF SUCH ITEMS ARE REQUESTED BY THE SARG.

7. IN ANSWER TO PARA 4A OF REF B, PRIMARY THREAT WHICH HOST GOVERNMENT BELIEVES IT FACES IS ANOTHER WAR OF SERIES OF WARS WITH ISRAEL. PARALLEL THREAT IT PERCEIVES IS FROM REJECTIONISTS, BOTH WITHIN THE OUTSIDE SYRIA, WHO ARE CLAIMING THAT PEACE AGREEMENT WITH STATE OF ISRAEL IS NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 04907 02 OF 02 021203Z POSS DUPE

IN ARAB INTEREST. GOVERNMENT IS MEETING THESE THREATS BY PARTICIPATION IN CURRENT EFFORTS TO ADVANCE A PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL, BY ACTING TO RESOTE ORDER AND SUPPORT REUNIFICATION IN LEBANON UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS AND BY DEVOTING GREATER ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. EMBASSY AND HOST GOVERNMENT'S ASSESSMENTS OF THESE THREATS DO NOT SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFER. MOST LIKELY ALTERNATIVE TO CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY IS RETURN TO REJECTIONIST ATTITUDE ADOPTED BY SYRIAN GOVERNMENT PRIOR TO 1973.

8. RECENT SYRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS LIKELY TO HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON US/SYRIAN RELATIONS IS RELAXATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, BEGINNING IN DECEMBER 1976. MOST RECENT NEWSWORTHY ITEM HAS BEEN APPROVAL FOR 13 SYRIAN JEWISH WOMEN TO DEPART SYRIA TO MARRY AMERICAN JEWISH MEN IN US AND FOR ONE SYRIAN JEWISH GIRL TO COME TO US FOR EDUCATION PURPOSES. ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACTUAL DEPARTURE ARE NOW BEING MADE. CONTINUED PROVISION OF US ASSISTANCE AS EVIDENCE OF US INTEREST IN SYRIAN DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUED US INVOLVEMENT IN PEACE PROCESS ARE LIKELY TO BE MET BY FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN SYRIAN HUMAN RIGHTS

PRACTICES. DENIAL OF SUCH ASSISTANCE ON GROUNDS THAT SYRIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES ARE DEFICIENT WOULD BE LIKELY TO HARDEN
SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE US AND FREEZE FURTHER PROGRESS
TOWARDS LIBERALIZING HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES WITHIN SYRIA.

MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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